

FALSE JUSTIFICATION AND TRUE NO. 2932

A SERMON
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*“If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me.”
Job 9:20*

*“It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?”
Romans 8:33-34*

THE great question for the human race to answer has ever been this, “How can man be just with God?” It is clear to every conscience that is at all awake that the thrice-holy God demands obedience to His law and that disobedience to the divine law will certainly entail punishment. Hence the grand essential for each one of us is to be right towards God—to be accounted just even at His judgment bar.

This is a most important matter at all times, but it appears to increase in importance as we advance in years and get nearer to that great testing time when the Lord shall put everyone into His unerring balances, to weigh him, and so to prove what he really is. Woe unto the man who shall stand before the bar of God unjustified. But happy shall he be who, in that last dread day, shall be approved and accepted by the Judge of all the earth.

I am going to speak about the way in which we are justified in the sight of God and I have taken two texts because so many people seem to have thought that there are two ways by which sinners can be justified before God. The first way that I shall describe is the false one, the second is the true way. The first is that which is mentioned by Job, the way of self-justification, of which it may be truly said that it is self-condemning instead of self-justifying.

The second mode of justification is the one that is ordained by God and of that it may rightly be said that it never can be condemned. It challenges heaven and earth and hell in those grand words which I have just read to you, “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?”

I. First, for a few minutes, let us consider THE SELF-JUSTIFICATION OF WHICH JOB SPEAKS—“If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me.”

I call to your remembrance the fact that it is Job who speaks thus, because, if there ever was a man in this world who might have been justified before God by his own works, it was Job. Did not the Lord Himself say of him to Satan, “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil”?

Yet, so far was Job from imagining that he had attained a sinless condition that he here declares concerning himself, “If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet I would not know my soul: I would despise my life.”

In addition to Job's excellence of character, he paid devout attention to religious observances. When his children met together for feasting, he ordered special sacrifices on their behalf, saying, “It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” Job was evidently as devout towards God as he was upright towards man, yet, you see, he tells us that if he were to justify himself, his own mouth would condemn him.

Further, as if to show us how notable Job was in all respects, he had, in addition to his excellent character and his devotional spirit, most remarkable afflictions. But putting together all his good works, all his religious observances, and all his afflictions, he says, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall

condemn me.” Job, at any rate, was not one of those who have imagined that they could work out a righteousness of their own which could be acceptable in the sight of God.

Let us try to find out what he meant when he said, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me.” I think he meant, first, that *it would not be true*. He could not and dare not say that he was just before God—it would be a lie for him to stand up before the Lord and say, “Great God, I deserve commendation at Your hands, for in me is found true righteousness.”

Instead of talking like that, Job says, “If I were to say that, my own mouth would contradict me while I was trying to say it. I could not say it—I dare not say it.” I hope there are many here who feel that to talk about any righteousness of their own would be utterly absurd. If I were to attempt to justify myself before God, I should have to lie to my conscience, my self-knowledge, and my whole being.

Whatever anyone else may think or say, I know that I must be saved by the grace of God or else I shall never be saved at all. I have not done a single good work in which I cannot see any faults—not one solitary thing which I cannot perceive to be marred and stained, and like a vessel spoiled even while it is on the potter’s wheel, not fit to be presented before God at all. That is what Job meant when he said, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me.”

But he meant, next, that *his words themselves would be sufficient to condemn him*. I know that I am addressing a large number of persons whose lives are apparently blameless. The most observant critic here would be unable to bring any very grave or serious charge against you, and yet, my dear friend, if you were to try to justify yourself before God, your words themselves would be enough to condemn you, for what sort of words do you use?

I do not suppose that you use profane words—I will not imagine that you take the name of God in vain. Though, alas! that is a sin that is not at all uncommon. But do you not often utter proud, boastful words? Do you not often speak in a very lofty way concerning yourselves and your own doing? Do we not all use far too many light and trifling words—not merely such as cheerfulness may warrant, but such as are a mere waste of time, diverting the mind from serious purposes? And did not our Lord Jesus Christ say that, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment”?

And friend, let me whisper other questions in your ear. Do you never use words of a very doubtful kind? Is it not far too common, in society, for people to go to the very verge of propriety in what they say? Have you never done so? And have you never used false words? Have you always spoken the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Has your heart always gone with your tongue? Have there been no false compliments—no lying expressions of an affection that you never felt?

I wish that certain people would more often go to the looking-glass and examine their tongues. Doctors judge their patients’ health by looking at their tongues—and we might judge of our moral and spiritual health in a similar way. Oh, what tongues some people would have if their words could blister their tongues as they ought to do!

How common it is to hear scandalous words and slanderous words—and how many hearts are made to bleed, full often, by the cruel things that are said! “If I justify myself,” says Job, “mine own mouth shall condemn me,” and I think he means, “because my very words have been sufficient to cause me to plead guilty before God.” I trust we also feel like that, and if we do, we shall never dare to be self-righteous.

I think, further, that Job meant that if he were to plead that he was righteous before God, he would be sure to make such a muddled statement that, somehow or other, *the statement itself would contain its own condemnation*. If a man says, “I have kept God’s law perfectly, so I can enter heaven by the merit of my own good works,” every intelligent person thinks, “What a proud man that is!” And can a proud man be accepted before God? Is it not written, “Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off”? So you see that a statement of justification, by betraying the pride of our heart, straightway condemns us.

Men who believe themselves to be saved by their own good works generally have something harsh and evil to say against God's grace, or against His Son, or against the divine plan of salvation through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. And the very fact that they say anything against those things shows that their heart is in rebellion against God and therefore their own mouth condemns them.

Years ago there was an old man in Wiltshire who, according to his own statement, was a hundred and three years of age. He had never neglected his parish church, he had brought up eleven children, and had no help from the parish, and he expected that, by and by, he would go home to God, for, "he had never done anything wrong in his life that he knowed about."

"But" said someone to him, "You are a sinner, you know." "I know I ain't," he said. "Well, but God says that you are." And what, think you, did that old man reply? He said, "God may say what He likes, but I know I ain't." So, you see, he even contradicted God Himself and is not that a great sin for anybody to commit?

What worse sin can there be and what clearer proof of the alienation of the human heart than that a man should flatly contradict God? Well, none of you ever did that, did you? No, you have not honesty enough to do that, but you mean it all the same. Many of you mean it in your very souls. When a man does not accept salvation by Jesus Christ, if you probe his heart to its very depths, you will find that his rejection means that he does not really feel that he is guilty in the sight of God. He will not admit that he needs divine mercy, nor will he accept salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ. Self-righteousness often lies concealed far down in the heart of man—but whenever he ventures to speak it out, the very way in which he talks of it condemns him.

I have heard men talk in this fashion—"Well, I am quite as good as others are. And if I am not all right at last, it will be a very bad look-out for a great many." Oh, yes, I see what you mean. Because others are not what they should be, you are content with your own condition because you are like them. There is no fear of God before your eyes and your only hope is that, as you are like others, it will be as well with you as it will be with them!

But is not that a poor hope to lean upon? Do you not know that the broad road is thronged with travelers and yet that it leads to destruction? Even if you fare as others do, it will be no comfort to you to perish as they do. There is a very ancient declaration which ought to be a warning to you—"Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

"Well," says another, "I have done my best and I cannot do more than that." When you speak like that, you mean to imply that God asks of you more than He ought to ask, that He really is unjust in His dealings with you and that the great evil is not that you are a bad servant, but that He is a tyrant Master. What is that but flinging down the gauntlet to the Almighty and charging Him with injustice? Such language as that betrays the enmity of your heart against the Most High.

"Well," says another, "I pay everybody all that is due." I am glad that you do so and wish everybody else did the same, but have you paid to God all that is due to Him? There is the great flaw in your life—you pay every creditor except your God, to whom you owe all that you have. Many a man who would not illtreat his dog, does not mind illtreating his God.

The last one of whom many of you think is your Creator, and Provider, and Preserver—the God who keeps the breath of life in your nostrils. You give some sort of consideration to the meanest servant in your kitchen, but to Him who made the heavens and the earth, to Him who sustains all things by the word of His power, you pay no regard whatsoever. As this is the real meaning of your attempt at self-justification, it carries its condemnation upon its very surface.

"Still," says one, "whatever I may seem to be, I am reasonably good at heart." Ah! that is another of the sayings that I have often heard, but I have never yet been able to believe that a man could be bad in life, yet good at heart. It is sometimes said of a man, who dies drunk and cursing his Maker, "Ah, he was a good fellow at bottom."

That is not the way that men talk in the market. If you go to buy a barrel of apples and see a lot of rotten and spoiled ones at the top of the barrel, do you believe the salesman when he says, "Ah, but the

apples underneath are very good ones”? Of course you do not believe anything of the kind. You always reckon that the fruit below is worse than that at the top, for the universal practice is to put the best at the top and the poorer quality underneath.

In like manner, we do not believe the man who says that he is good at bottom, and good at heart, although his life is evil. No, sir, you are even worse in heart than you ever were in life, because there are many things that restrain you from revealing your naked self to these who only see your outward life. But your sin is there, down at the bottom of your heart—and if you attempt to justify yourself in the sight of God—the very statement that you make will condemn you.

Besides, so conscious are men that their own good works will not justify them before God, that *I do not remember ever meeting with a person who absolutely professed to be at peace with God as the result of his own endeavors*. If I were to ask any man who says that he is righteous simply because of what he has himself done or been, “Are you prepared to die?” he would shake his head, and say, “Oh, no! I am not prepared to die.”

You say that you have done nothing wrong and that you are all right. But suppose that tomorrow you were to be called to stand at God’s judgment bar—would you feel comfortable at the prospect? “Oh, no!” you say. I felt sure that must be your answer. Indeed, all the religions in the world that teach the doctrine of salvation by works are at least honest enough not to pretend to ensure for any man present salvation.

Take, for instance, that gigantic form of error, the Romish system of religion. It never tells anybody that he is saved. There is not a cardinal, though he is called a prince of the church, and there is not a pope, though he is called Christ’s vicar on earth, who dares to say that he is saved. They have some kind of faint hope that they may be saved at some future period, but there are none of them who dare to say that they are already saved.

As to using the language of the apostle Paul, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”—language which even boys and girls in our Sunday school can use as soon as they have believed in Jesus Christ—well, even the greatest and the wisest of them cannot say that, either while they are in full health and strength, or when they are about to die.

What becomes even of their great cardinals when they die? I have seen a notice of this sort put up in their churches and probably many of you have also seen it—“Of your charity, pray for the repose of the soul of Cardinal So-and-so.” So that it is evident that he has gone somewhere or other where he is not at rest. It is quite clear that he has not gone to heaven, so all that he has done, all the masses that he has said, all the confessions he has made, and all the penances he has undergone, have done nothing for him but land him somewhere where he has not repose for his soul.

But it is the glory of the Gospel of Christ that it says to the sinner, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be justified immediately. Trust in what He has done and you shall be saved, and you shall know that you are saved, and that you shall be saved forever.” This is a Gospel that is worth preaching. And I pray you therefore to regard it as worth hearing, while I try to expound it during the few remaining minutes available for my discourse.

And in order that you may do so, I urge you to put away all self-righteousness in which you have hitherto trusted. Bury it. Bury it forever. It will only ruin you if you rely upon it.

II. Our second text reveals THE DIVINE JUSTIFICATION OF WHICH THE APOSTLE PAUL SPEAKS—“It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?”

Brethren and sisters in Christ, you know that *God can justify the ungodly*. We may put this truth very broadly and say that God can take an unjust, unrighteous sinner, and by a wondrous process, which made even the angels in heaven to be astonished when it was revealed to them, He can take the guilt from the guilty one and cast it into the depths of the sea.

And He can cover the unrighteous man with a spotless robe of righteousness, so that he shall be accounted fair and lovely, and whiter than the newly-fallen snow. God can do this, at once, for every soul that is willing to accept the divine plan of salvation. Well might the apostle say, “It is God that

justifieth.” Oh, what a blessing it is that God is able to pardon the guilty, and both to impute and impart righteousness to those who have none of their own!

Notice how this great work is done. *The whole wondrous plan of salvation can be summed up in a single word—substitution.* As the first Adam stood before God as the representative and federal head of the whole human race, and as it was by his sin that our whole race fell, it became possible for God to regard our race as a whole, and to find for us another Adam who would come and stand in our stead and represent us as the first Adam did. So that, as in the first Adam we fell, we might be raised up by a second Adam.

That second Adam is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, the Lord from heaven. He has been here upon this earth and He has kept the law of God in every jot and tittle, and has woven a righteousness which covers the sinner from head to foot when he is enabled to put it on. And then, when the law of God examines him, it cannot find a flaw, or a rent, or even a faulty thread in that matchless robe which is woven from the top throughout.

In addition to this, inasmuch as we had actually sinned against the Lord, this glorious God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, suffered the terrible consequences of our sin. Oh, wondrous truth! He went up to the accursed tree and freely gave Himself up to die a felon’s death, that, in that death, the justice of God might be vindicated and that God might be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believes in Jesus. It is thus that God can reckon the sinner to be just, because Jesus has taken his place and borne the penalty that was due for his sin.

“But” asks someone, “how is that great work accomplished? I see that Christ suffered instead of sinners and wrought out a righteousness which sinners could never have wrought for themselves, but how can that righteousness become theirs?” God’s plan, my friend, is that you should hide yourself in Christ. You must come to Christ and take what He has done to be yours by an act of simple faith.

I cannot use a better illustration than that of the sin-offering brought to the priest under the Mosaic dispensation. When the sacrificial animal was about to be slain, the sinner came and laid his hands upon the head of the beast, and confessed his sin over the appointed sin-offering. Thus his sin was put on the animal—which was then killed and consumed—and so, in type, the man’s sin was put away.

In a similar fashion, come, beloved, to my Lord Jesus Christ at this very moment, and by an act of faith, put your sin where God long ago laid it, and in token of that act, say to your Lord and Savior Himself,—

*“My faith doth lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And thus confess my sin.”*

If you do thus trust Christ, even though you have never done so in all your life before, it does not matter—for, if you have done so now, then your sin is laid upon Christ and He has so completely borne the penalty for it that it has ceased to be—and His righteousness is accounted yours seeing that you are a believer in Him. When God looks at you, He sees no sin in you, nor does He mark any lack of righteousness in you—for the sake of Jesus Christ, His Son, He does accept and look upon you as though you had always kept His righteous law.

“But for whom is this great work accomplished?” someone asks—“you surely do not mean that it is for me?” I do mean that it is for you if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you will not trust to Him, on your own head be the guilt of your soul’s eternal ruin. If you will have Christ’s righteousness, it is for you.

“What,” you say, “for such a guilty sinner as I am?” Harken, man—if you had not been guilty, God need not have provided a righteousness for you. Of course, Christ’s righteousness is for the guilty—for whom should it be if not for them? “Do you mean,” asks one, “that, in a moment, I may be cleansed

from all sin simply by believing in Jesus?" Yes, I do mean that. You, even you, may be cleansed this very instant.

"But I have not lived a good life." If you had lived a good life, you would not have needed a Savior. Christ Jesus came into the world to save, not the good, but the bad. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly." Publish that blessed truth round the whole earth and let the ungodly especially hear it. Jesus Himself said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Therefore you sin-sick souls, trust yourselves to the Christ who came on purpose to heal just such souls as you are.

Only trust Him and there is immediate pardon and immediate salvation for you. "This is too good to be true," says one. Not so, for high as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's thoughts above your thoughts and His ways above your ways. You feel that you could not forgive like this, any who had wronged you, but God's ways are not to be measured by yours.

You have often heard us praise and extol Him by singing,—

***"Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?"***

My first text said, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me." But my second text as good as says, "*If God justifies me, nobody can condemn me.*" Paul, who wrote these words, and who had been a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a murderer, boldly declares, "It is God that justifieth," and then utters the confident challenge, "Who is he that condemneth?"

Are you not astonished to hear that little man from Tarsus talk in such a fashion as that? Why, there is the blood of the martyr Stephen crying out of the ground and saying, "Why, Paul, I condemn you." Then there is the blood of all the poor men and women whom he dragged off to prison, or compelled to blaspheme the name of Christ, and those whom he put to death in every city—does not the blood of the martyrs cry out against Paul the apostle, who was once Saul the persecutor? How does he dare to cry, "Who is he that condemneth?"

Yet there is no voice of blood raised against him. All is still and silent, for God has blotted out forever even that great sin which he had committed. But do not the fiends of hell bring accusations against him? Does not the arch-fiend lift up his head and say, "Saul of Tarsus, you are a liar, for I can condemn you. You know what a self-righteous man you used to be and how you sinned against God in that way"? No, even Satan himself dare not accuse the apostle, for, "it is God that justifieth." He has so effectually silenced the powers of darkness with the blood and righteousness of Christ that, like dogs which dread their master's whip, they lie down in their kennel not daring even to howl against a blood-washed child of God.

But do you not expect the angels in heaven, who saw Stephen die and watched Saul of Tarsus in all his cruel persecutions, to bend down from their shining thrones and say, "O Paul, it ill becomes you to ask, 'Who is he that condemneth?' when all of us can condemn you"? Oh, no! They all see the splendor of the righteousness of Christ and they are all glad to take their harps, and sing a new song to the praise and glory of Jesus.

Paul's triumphant declaration, "It is God that justifieth," seems to start them singing again, as John heard them in his island prison, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." You may thus challenge hell, earth, and heaven if you believe in Jesus—for if God has justified you, who is he that can condemn you?

"But" says someone, "we must feel something." Just so, but if you ever do feel aright, Christ must make you feel aright. You must not bring your feelings to Christ any more than your works—salvation by feelings is no more possible than salvation by good works. Salvation is all of grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

"Well," says one "I am, spiritually, brought to a bankrupt condition, for if I turned my pockets inside out, metaphorically, I could not find a solitary farthing in them." Well, then, you are the very man to

receive the free grace of Christ. When you have no merits, no good feelings, nothing whatever to recommend you—when at hell’s dark door you lie, then it is that salvation’s joyful sound is pleasant to your ears, and blessed are the ears that hear it, and blessed is the heart that accepts it.

Ask Christ for it and you shall have it. The Holy Spirit Himself will help you to ask for it aright. Ask Him to teach you how to ask for it. Ask Christ for everything—for all your salvation, from foundation to topstone—is in Him and He will freely bestow it upon you for His own glory.

Now I must close my discourse by reminding you that *this way of finding justification by faith in Jesus Christ has commended itself to the best of men*—and I hope it will commend itself to you. Cowper, in one of his later letters, says—(I will give you his words as nearly as I can remember them)—“I cannot survey the future with any joy when I look upon it from the top of my own good works. Though I have labored ever since my conversion to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men, yet my only hope in death is in the blood and righteousness of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whom death once sheathed his sting.”

And when Dr. Watts, that sweet singer of Israel, was dying, he said to one who stood by his bedside, “I heard an old divine once say that when the most learned Christian minister comes to die, he draws his greatest comfort from the plainest promises of God’s Word. And so,” said Dr. Watts, “do I, and I bless God that they are so simple that they do not need any great understanding in order to grasp them. My hope is simply in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior.” And so the good man fell asleep.

If we had time and opportunity, we might multiply such testimonies almost indefinitely, for all the children of God who have lived the best conceivable lives uniformly declare that they do not trust for salvation in anything they have done, or felt, or been, or suffered—but that they live by faith upon the Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them.

I should like to finish by telling you the way in which one of the old Puritans, Mr. Thomas Doolittle, once finished a sermon, and I pray that God will set His blessing on it. The preacher turned to one of the members of the church, sitting in the left-hand gallery, and addressing him by name, he said, “Brother So-and-so, do you repent having trusted your soul to Christ?” And the brother answered, “No, sir, I do not repent it, for I never knew what true joy and peace meant until I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Mr. Doolittle then turned to the other side of the gallery and said, “Brother So-and-so, do you repent having trusted your soul with Christ?” And he answered, “No, sir, I do not. I have known the Lord since I was a child, and my soul’s rest and confidence have been found in Him. And the more I know Him, the more I rejoice in Him.”

Then, looking straight before him, to a young man who had been somewhat uneasy during the sermon, the preacher said, “Young man, I do not know your name, but will you have the blood and righteousness of Christ to save you?” The young man was so abashed by this public appeal that he hid his face and said nothing. The person sitting next to him nudged him, and the minister, looking straight at him, said to him, “Young man, will you answer this question? There is salvation for you in Jesus Christ if you believe in Him. Are you ready to believe in Him?”

The young man looked up and said, “Yes, sir.” “When?” asked the preacher. The young man replied, “Now, sir.” “Then,” said he, “listen to the voice of God. ‘Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.’” That young man and his father became two earnest Christian men renowned in the church in years afterwards.

It might not be wise for me to exactly imitate that good man’s action, and if I specially addressed a young man, the old men might think that I did not mean them to trust in Christ—and the young women might imagine that I had passed them over. So, instead of speaking only to one person, I will put the question to everybody here.

I have told you about God’s way of making you just in His sight—now, are you willing to be made just in God’s way? If you die unjust, you will be lost forever. If you live unjust, you will miss all true peace and rest of heart. Are you willing to have God’s righteousness? You say, “Yes.” Well, faith is the

accepting of what God gives. Faith is the believing what God says. Faith is the trusting to what Jesus has done. Only do you this and you are saved, as surely as you are alive.

You may have come into this place unsaved and have been sitting here a lost soul—yet you may go home saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation and you may know it, too. So I say to each individual here—If *you* believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are saved—saved now and saved forever. Therefore, be of good courage, you who have trusted in the Lord, and go your way rejoicing in Him and may God bless you both now and forever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ROMANS 10

In commenting once more upon this familiar chapter, I cannot help repeating a remark which I have made to you before—that it is very significant that this tenth chapter should immediately follow the subject dealt with in the ninth chapter. In the ninth chapter, we have the doctrine of absolute predestination proclaimed in the sternest and boldest manner—the doctrine that God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion.

Now, it is commonly thought by those who do not rightly understand Calvinism, that that doctrine has a tendency to burden the heart and dry up the springs of compassion. That it was not so in Paul's case, is very clear, for this chapter is a most affectionate one, and in it the apostle manifests a most loving spirit towards his fellow countrymen, the Jews, and the chapter also contains the widest conceivable declaration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the fact being that the grand doctrine of divine predestination is by no means inconsistent with the fullest and freest preaching of the Gospel of Christ.

Verse 1. *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*

Paul is writing concerning the Jews—the very people who had driven him from city to city, and who had again and again sought to take his life. Yet he could not forget that these men were his own countrymen, and consequently, with a consecrated patriotism, he desired beyond everything else that they might be saved.

2. *For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.*

The Jews of Paul's day were zealous, but they were zealous in ignorance. And that is just what we may say, at the present time, concerning a large number of our fellow countrymen—those who are ordinarily called Ritualists. “They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” None can be more zealous than they are, but a grave error is at the root of their whole system—a fatal ignorance concerning the truth of the Gospel.

3. *For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

Man must have a righteousness of one kind or another—and if he has not a God-given righteousness, he seeks to have one of his own making. As the spider spins her web out of her own bowels, so do sinful men try to manufacture a righteousness out of that which is within them—but this they can never do. The only righteousness which will stand the test of the day of judgment is that which God bestows upon believers in His Son Jesus Christ. Oh, that all men were willing to submit themselves to the righteousness of God!

4. *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

“The end of the law” is to make a man righteous and Christ does make righteous everyone who believes in Him. The act of faith in Christ accomplishes what all the good works in the world can never accomplish.

5. *For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.*

That is the message of the law—"Do, and live." But the message of the Gospel is, "Live, and do"—a very different thing. The law says, "Work to obtain life." The Gospel says, "You have life freely given to you in Christ Jesus—now work for Him because you live by Him."

6-9. *But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

How simple is the divine plan of salvation—confess Jesus Christ believing in Him—or in the other order, believe in Jesus Christ and then acknowledge your faith, for so it is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"—baptism being the way of confessing the faith which you already possess.

10-13. *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

What precious promises these are and how wide they are! "Whosoever—whosoever." That must include you, dear friend, if you believe in Jesus and call upon the name of the Lord.

14-15. *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

Here you have the whole plan of salvation. Christ is preached, sinners hear the message of the Gospel, they believe it, and so they are saved. What a mass of rubbish men have interjected into this blessed simple plan! What counterfeits of so-called sacraments, and what a mass of human doings, and external paraphernalia of all sorts have they interjected! God requires none of their fripperies, and fineries and ornate performances, but simply says, "Believe, and live."

How different is this from the cumbrous, complicated plan by which men would destroy our souls! Cling to the old-fashioned Gospel, beloved, and never turn away from it. There is nothing that can take the place of the simplicity of divine truth. God grant that throughout England, and from one end of the world to the other, salvation by believing—the result of hearing the Gospel—may be proclaimed.

16. *But they have not all obeyed the gospel.*

That is the pity of it—that so many have heard the Gospel, but have not obeyed it. This shows that the Gospel comes to us as a command, because we cannot disobey where there is no order or rule. O sinner, listen to this! When you hear the Gospel, it is not left to your own choice to have it or leave it, so that you are as free to do the one as the other. So if you reject it, you are disobedient to it.

16-18. *For For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard?*

Ah, that is the important question! If they had not heard it, they could not be condemned for disobeying it, for the sin lies in hearing and yet not believing. "Have they not heard?"

18-19. *Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and the words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know?*

Did not the Jews hear the Gospel? Certainly they did and they rejected it. Moses foretold it would be so—

19. *First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.*

So the poor outcast Gentiles have received Christ although Israel rejected Him.

20-21. *But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.*

God grant that we may not be disobedient and gainsaying, as Israel was, but that we may all accept Christ at once as our only and all-sufficient Savior!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.